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SHIELD WEEKLY

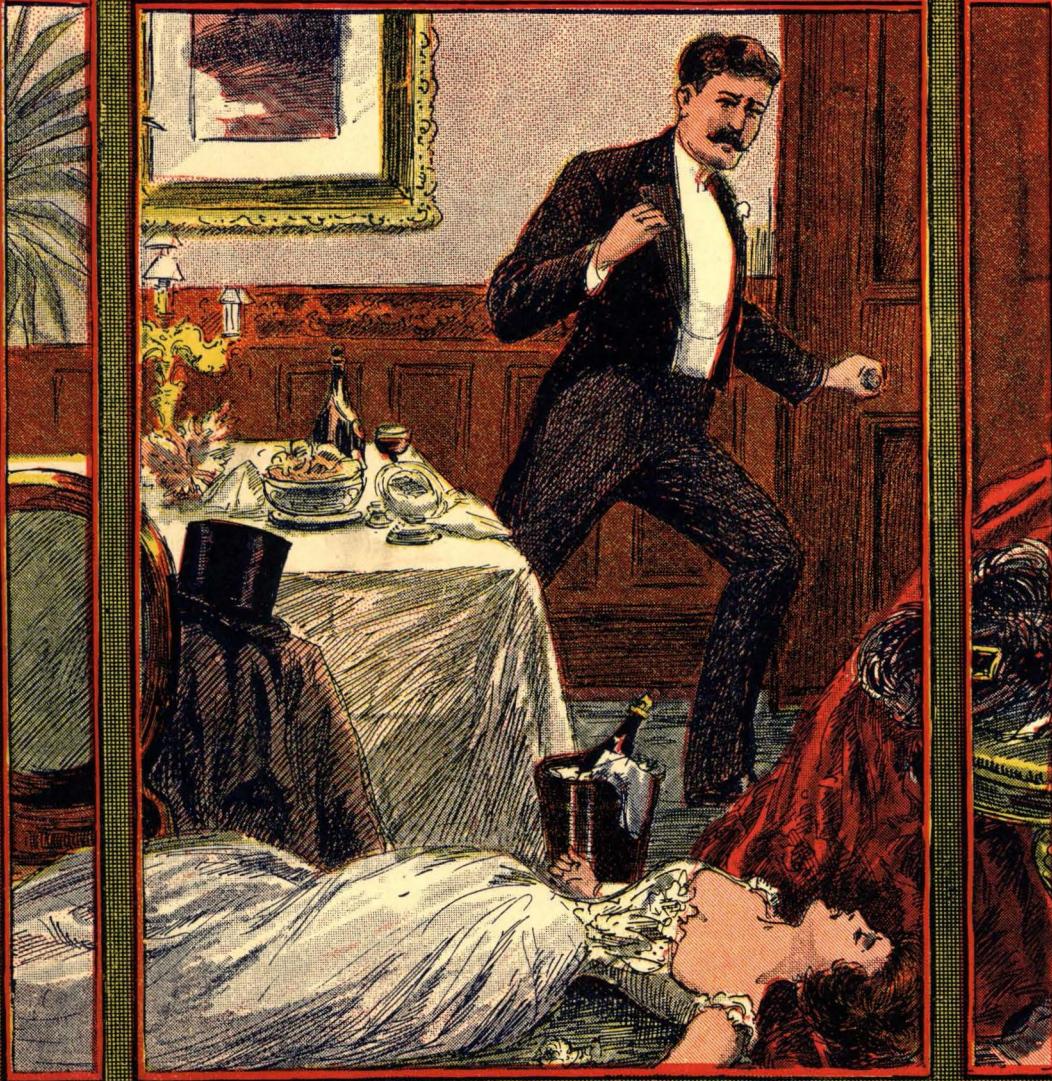
TRUE STORIES FROM
FAMOUS CHIEFS

THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
OF POLICE



UNDER THE KNIFE

or The Cloak of Guilt
BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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SHIELD WEEKLY



TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

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No. 11.

NEW YORK, February 16, 1901.

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Under the Knife; OR, THE CLOAK OF GUILT.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

KEENE FINDS TWO BAD EGGS.

"Move on, gentlemen! One way or the other. You are blocking the doorway. Either come in or go out."

"Come in is easier said than done, Mr. Keene."

The detective smiled slightly, much as if inclined to agree with the speaker, and then moved away amid the throng of people filling the spacious vestibule and office of the magnificent Boston Hotel.

"What name did you say, Peasley?" asked the companion of the man addressed. "Did you call him Keene?"

"Yes," was the reply; "don't you know him?"

"I cannot say that I do."

"Humph! I thought everybody knew Sheridan Keene."

"Not the detective!" exclaimed the questioner; and his gaze again went searching for the tall, lithe figure and forceful face of the man who, with a manner at once courteous and commanding, had accosted them, and who now had disappeared in the crowd. "You don't mean, Peasley, that that was Sheridan Keene, the detective?"

"The same," nodded Peasley; "and one of the cleverest in the professh. The reception here to-night has brought out a mob, and Keene is probably here on special duty. Let's wriggle through to the café."

There was, indeed, a crowd. Though the reception dinner was ended, the dining-room still was thronged with chattering people. The commodious parlors, the large library, the elaborate main office and the devious corridors, were made wellnigh impassable by the great gathering.

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Nearly all of the men were in full evening dress. The gorgeous silks and satins of the ladies augmented with glistening rainbow hues the dazzling brilliancy of the animated picture. From a hundred snowy bosoms priceless jewels blazed, as if with living fire, and diamonds vied on all sides with eyes lent radiance by wine and excitement.

"A rare opportunity for one of the light-fingered gentry," dryly observed Peasley's companion, as they made their way toward the café.

"True," nodded Peasley; "that is probably why so many officers are about here."

"I haven't noticed many."

"They are in citizen's dress," laughed Peasley. "They are like the commercial traveler's overcoat in his expense account; you don't see it, but it's there. Try lifting something that don't belong to you, my dear boy; and before you see him, you'll feel the hand of one of them on your shoulder, and most likely a nice pair of bracelets on your wrists. Come and have a Manhattan."

It was the hour, too, when the theatres were closing; when carriages and cabs were rattling madly over the cold pavements; when café, lunch-room and saloon were putting in their final strokes of the day.

And, too, it was the time when cosy private dining-rooms in the best hotels were at a premium.

Ten minutes after the curtain had fallen on the grand opera at the Boston, a hack whirled up to the side door of the hotel, and a party entered. Sheridan Keene drew somewhat aside to allow them to pass, but they halted quite near him and waited for the elevator.

The party consisted of two men and two women. One of the men was in middle life. He was short and stout, with an oily, unctuous countenance, and eyes as placidly bright as his expansive polished shirt-front. He was booked on the register as Dr. Cyrus Yardley, London, England.

The other was a younger man. He was tall and narrow, with shoulders slightly bowed. His face was sallow; his nose was hooked; his eyes were grayish-yellow and very uninviting. He, too, was English, and

in the presence of a third party Dr. Yardley invariably addressed him as Lord Moreland.

One of their companions was an elderly woman, quite richly dressed, and whose pale cheeks and hollow eyes indicated declining health. The other was her daughter, still in the twenties. She wore a Van Dyke hat with drooping plumes, and a handsome opera cloak hung loose over her lovely white shoulders, half hiding her fine figure. Her face was quite handsome, with regular features, a pretty mouth, and brilliant dark eyes.

The expression of the latter struck Sheridan Keene, during his brief glance at her, as presenting a curious mingling of resolution, restlessness and apprehension. They were flashed about while the party stood waiting, until they fell upon one of the hotel waiters, a colored man in evening dress, who stood like a statue against the wall nearby, there either by accident or design.

Between the handsome girl in the opera cloak, and the ~~exact~~, motionless figure of this colored servant, Sheridan Keene saw one swift, intelligent glance, as of mutual understanding, pass like a quick flash. It appealed to him with rather curious significance, yet he did not consider it a matter for his investigation, and courtesy demanded that he should not stare longer at the girl; for the detective was in full evening dress, and, so-far as looks indicated, he might have been one of the distinguished guests of the occasion. He turned and moved a few yards away.

At the same moment the girl took advantage of the delay at the elevator. She nodded presently to a lady across the corridor, then stepped over to reply to her question:

"Have you been to the opera, Miss Russell?"

"Yes," smiled the girl; "we have just returned. What a crowd!"

"Decidedly," laughed the lady, moving on. "But it now is beginning to thin out a little."

Miss Russell moved a few steps farther from her companions, and stood with her back toward them, apparently gazing at something down the corridor. Scarce any person there would have noticed that she had drawn nearer the motionless figure of the col-

ored waiter, who had not stirred from his position. Yet to him she said, softly:

"Is the room ready? Careful!"

The man answered her without a movement of his head, and scarce a movement of his lips, even.

"Yes, miss!"

"Has anyone come?"

"Not yet."

"If he comes first, do not follow him in there. I shall lock the door after I've entered. Then see that I am not interrupted."

"Leave it to me, miss. I'll stand outside."

This episode had required but a moment. The elevator was approaching from above. Miss Russell rejoined her companions.

"Are you going to the smoking-room before retiring, Dr. Yardley?" she now asked, with a quick glance at the round face of the London physician.

"I think so, my dear Stella," replied Dr. Yardley, with one of his oily smiles. "Lord Moreland cannot sleep without his smoke, you know. We shall come up presently, my dear, and I then will visit your mother. You do not feel quite exhausted, Mrs. Russell?"

The elderly woman shook her head, and forced a smile to her pale features.

"Not quite, doctor," she said, rather wearily; "but I think I'll retire."

"Oh, by all means! I will come in and give you a powder before you sleep, however, which will have a tendency to——"

"Going up!"

The voice of the elevator boy cut short the physician's remark, and Stella Russell suddenly stepped nearer.

"Please see my mother to her room, Moreland," she said, quickly. "I will come up presently. I wish to speak to Mrs. Paget, who has just gone into the drawing-room."

Before she had finished this brief explanation, even, the girl's voice had become unsteady, and the color was fading from her cheeks.

A gentleman had entered by the side door, passing the group. He hurried through the corridor, and turned down another, which adjoined several private dining-rooms overlooking the street. He had passed the group without a glance, nor had the girl appeared to observe him. He was a tall man, with a

pointed, dark beard, and he wore an Inverness coat.

"It is already late, Stella," Mrs. Russell objected, with some austerity. "Do not remain too long."

"Only a little while," replied the girl. "You are keeping the car waiting!"

Only by an effort had she escaped them, and by taking advantage of the circumstances in a way that indicated previous designing. As the car ascended, containing her mother and Moreland, she turned again to Dr. Yardley.

"If you go up before I do, doctor, stay with her till I come, will you?" she asked, with her dark eyes squarely meeting those of the physician.

Dr. Yardley's countenance did not change; but in the searching scrutiny he bestowed upon her, there was a mingling of craftiness and suspicion which brought a flush to the girl's cheeks.

"Certainly, my dear Stella," he bowed. "Where did you say you were going?"

"Merely to the drawing-room, doctor. You'll find me there if you want me. I wish to speak to Mrs. Paget."

"I shall be in the smoking-room for a half-hour. After that I will join you."

The girl nodded and smiled.

The physician turned in the direction of the office, and approached the cigar case; but his crafty eyes had a backward turn until Stella Russell had entered the drawing-room.

The moment the latter was alone she moved more quickly and decisively. Casting a backward glance, to make sure that she was not followed, she quickly located the lady to which she had previously spoken. Approaching her from one side, she slipped a hand around her arm and significantly pressed it, saying softly:

"If any person should ask for me, Mrs. Paget, kindly say I've just left you, and that you didn't notice which way I went. I wish briefly to meet a friend on the sly."

Mrs. Paget laughed and seemed to understand.

"Leave inquisitive parties to me, dear," she replied, with a nod.

Stella Russell thanked her with an expressive look, then hastened through the adjoin-

ing parlor and to the corridor door. A glance revealed Dr. Yardley still hanging over the cigar case, with his back toward her. Without a moment's hesitation she now entered the corridor, turning quickly into that adjoining it, and hastened after the man in the Inverness coat. Less than five minutes had passed since these several persons had entered the house.

Something like a quarter-hour later, Sheridan Keene sauntered down to the smoking-room and bar. The crowd had thinned out, and several tables were vacant. One of these was near that at which two men were seated, whom the detective recognized as the companions of the girl in an opera cloak. Without knowing why, he did not fancy their faces; yet when he sat down near by, lighting a cigar and taking up an evening paper, he noticed that they did not pay him the slightest attention, as they might have done if really worthy of suspicion.

Five minutes passed.

The detective still puffed at his cigar, and appeared absorbed in the matter he was reading.

The men at the next table still gossiped over their drinks.

And then, for the first time, Dr. Yardley let drop a succession of remarks that caused Sheridan Keene to prick up his ears.

With a dainty liquor glass poised between his thumb and finger, and with so complacently crafty a voice, that the detective now set him down for a knave, the physician observed:

"You should have learned by this time, Moreland, that I know fast colors. There will nothing come out in the washing. The pigeon already is flying lower, you may take my word for that. With the mother-bird netted, we may surely clip the wings of the other. She is already weakening, Moreland, take my word for it."

The man opposite shrugged his narrow shoulders, and frowned through the smoke from his cigar.

"What do you tell by?" he demanded, tersely, in a dry, rasping voice. "I have seen none of your favorable signs."

"You haven't my eyes," rejoined Dr. Yardley, replacing his glass on the table and rub-

bing his soft, fat hands. "My professional experience, Jimmy, is really worth more than all your worldly knowledge."

"Do you think so?"

"I know so! You judge a woman by her looks and her conduct; I read her by the throbbing of her pulse, the heart's infallible index. She is weakening, Jimmy, take my word for it. We have been here five days; in five days more the trick shall have been turned."

Again the man opposite shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"I am not so sure of it, Yardley," he smiled, through the smoke. "A woman's conduct goes far with me."

"Faugh! the bird has ceased beating her cage! That is a sure sign of exhaustion and despair."

"Or a rest that prepares for still greater efforts," grumbled Moreland. "Where is she now?"

"Up in the drawing-room."

"Where?"

"In the drawing-room," repeated Dr. Yardley. "Why do you start?"

"She wasn't there when I came down."

It was the physician's turn to show surprise. He leaned suddenly forward, with an ugly light dispelling the placidity of his narrow eyes, demanding sharply:

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am sure! I have eyes enough for that, at least."

"It is possible that I may be wrong! Yes, even I may be wrong!" muttered the physician, starting up. "Come with me at once! We will see where she is."

Keene followed the two men with his gaze, as they hurried from the room, and there settled on his face an expression which many a malefactor could recall to his cost. Presently he arose and followed them, saying to himself:

"They are two bad eggs, or I'm much mistaken. The drawing-room, eh?"

He turned his steps in that direction. It was after eleven o'clock. Many of the people had departed, and the halls were now quite clear. In the parlor and corridors women were putting on their outside garments, aided by companions and escorts, and

the rumble of carriages in the street outside was almost incessant.

Keene paused at the threshold of the drawing-room and glanced over the people within. Neither of the men he sought, nor the girl in the opera cloak, were among them. The absence of all three was like a spur in the side of his suspicion; he quickened his steps, flashing a quick glance into the adjoining parlor, and then struck to the corridor which branched off along one side of the great hotel.

Near the door of a private dining-room some thirty feet away a colored servant was standing, with his gaze intently turned toward a side door making to the street, as if with distrust of some person or persons who had just passed out. From one of the nearer rooms a party of five, three of them ladies, was approaching, putting on their wraps.

Something in the attitude of the negro led Sheridan Keene to start through the corridor. At the same moment the door near which the servant was standing suddenly opened, and a man stepped forth, wearing an Inverness coat.

At the same moment Keene heard the voice of Dr. Yardley, from some quarter which he could not then determine, shouting wildly:

"Stop that man! Stop him! He has committed murder. Stop that man!"

The voice came from outside the window of the dining-room from which the man in the Inverness coat had emerged. The latter halted for one instant and closed the door of the room, which immediately drowned the sound of Yardley's reiterated cries. Then his eyes swept the corridor in both directions. The waiter stood between him and the street door. In the opposite direction were a half-dozen people, among them Sheridan Keene.

The delay on the part of this man was but the fraction of a second. Then he started like one bent on escape, and darted toward a near stairway making to a rear basement.

Keene whipped out his revolver, and started after him like a hound let loose from leash.

"Halt, or I'll fire!" he thundered, as he ran.

"Fire, if you wish!"

Bang!

The bullet splintered the woodwork of the door through which the man in the Inverness coat was vanishing.

The screams of affrighted women rose on every side. The colored waiter rushed to the door of the private dining-room and opened it. As he passed it, in pursuit of the fleeing man, Keene glanced into the room.

Stretched dead upon the floor was the form of the girl he had seen a half-hour previous; but now her snowy bosom and rich attire were wet with crimson blood!

CHAPTER II.

A MAN OF NERVE.

Sheridan Keene now knew that he had struck a dark and mysterious case.

He was sure of some deep-laid, vicious scheme of some kind, and probably more than one. The remarks of the two men in the smoking-room had been significant of one at least.

Yet there was certainly something more.

This appeared in the fact that Yardley had been the man to discover the appalling crime just committed. That the discovery was a surprise, and had occasioned him great horror and dismay, had sounded in his voice.

As he passed the door of the private dining-room, Keene's quick eyes caught sight of the oily-faced doctor climbing in through the window from the street. It was very evident that his attempt to prevent the escape of the murderer was genuine, and it indicated that no criminal collusion existed between him and the man in the Inverness coat.

Yet Keene had read the doctor like a book, and was satisfied that he was a villain. To the eyes of a detective like Sheridan Keene, the soul of a knave appeared in every expression of this smooth physician's unctuous and crafty face.

Here, then, was a mystery on top of a mystery, and it became vitally necessary to secure this last criminal red-handed.

These were the pertinent deductions that flashed through the mind of Sheridan Keene the instant he saw the body of the girl on the dining-room floor, and Yardley climbing in through the window.

With breakneck recklessness, born of a determination to overtake and arrest him, he flew down the stairs taken by the man in the Inverness coat.

They led to a long entry in the basement. This was as dark as a man's pocket, but through two side doors could be dimly discerned a large laundry, with windows opening to a rear yard.

For a moment the detective paused and listened. He had lost his man in the intense darkness, and suspected that he was hiding.

Presently he heard a key being cautiously turned in a door at the farther end of the long corridor. That settled it. Keene instantly plunged on through the darkness, guiding himself by the near wall, and shouted the stern command:

"Halt, or I'll shoot you!"

"If you do, you'll shoot an innocent man!"

"Obey me, then!"

"I'd sooner shoot myself!"

"If innocent, why need to fly?"

"Honor demands it!"

Though he was sure enough that the voice was feigned, it had such a ring of true manhood that the detective held his fire.

All this occurred in the fraction of a minute, while the men still were twenty or thirty feet apart, and enveloped in Egyptian darkness.

Then the door at which the fugitive had been working was suddenly opened. He had succeeded in unlocking it and withdrawing the key.

Thrown into outline against the starlight in the back yard, Keene again beheld the man, and, for a moment, could see his own way.

He darted forward to prevent the closing of the door, and missed it only by a hair. Then it was forcibly closed, nearly taking in the tips of his fingers, and the key was turned from the outside.

Despite the awful crime he feared had been committed, Keene could not but admire the nerve of this man who, under the very muzzle of a revolver, could deliberately stand to insert the key and secure the door.

With that way of egress cut off, Keene darted back to the laundry. There the dark-

ness was less intense, and he sprang to the nearest window.

The fugitive was scaling the high wooden fence at the opposite side of the yard, and in a twinkling had disappeared over the top.

Keene threw open the window, leaped out into the yard, and followed him, climbing over the high fence with the agility of a cat.

"You evidently mean to lead me a warm chase, my man, but I'll gamble I'll run you down!" he said to himself, not a particle displeased, because his game was worth the hunt.

The fence he had scaled bordered a double line of railway tracks, with a high embankment on either side. Surmounting that opposite were several long blocks of fine brick dwellings, with rear yards; also a corresponding high wooden fence, with an alley between.

Sheridan Keene darted down to the level tracks, and began a desperate sprint after his victim. The man in the Inverness coat was fifty yards away, running at the top of his speed.

Suddenly he diverged to the left; clambering up the high embankment with both hands and feet. On reaching the top he scaled the wooden fence, with the skill and celerity of an athlete.

It brought him into a long alley back of the brick dwellings. There he spied an open gate of one of the back yards.

A light was burning in the kitchen.

The fugitive secured the gate with the same deliberate nerve that he had locked the hotel door, when preventing Keene's immediate egress.

Now he smoothed his pointed beard, adjusted his Inverness, and unceremoniously opened the back door of the house and strode into the entry.

A buxom Irish servant girl, who was seated on the knee of a burly, blue-coated policeman in the kitchen, started up with a scream.

The amazed officer, not a little confused at being unexpectedly caught off his beat, leaped up and drew his club.

The man in the Inverness coat seemed eminently superior to any situation.

"That's all right, Casey!" he cried, quickly, with a deep and authoritative voice. "Put up that club!"

"Be gob! who are you?" gasped the astonished officer.

"I am Sheridan Keene, the detective!" cried the man in the Inverness, speaking with great rapidity and sternness. "There's been a murder committed in the hotel yonder, and I've tracked the assassin into these back yards. Have you heard anybody moving around out there?"

"Devil a soul, so help me!"

"If you do, Casey, arrest him at once and hold him till I return! Can I get through this house to the front street?"

"Yis, yis, sor!" cried the girl, catching up his question, and glad to be rid of him so easily.

"That's good!"

"Sure, it's meself that'll show you the way."

"Don't you bother, my man! You look after the man out back there, the two of you, and hold him fast if you find him!"

His last stern command sounded from the stairs he was already mounting. The entire episode had occupied but a quarter-minute.

The man in the Inverness strode up the stairs and through the main hall, which was in darkness, and let himself out by the front door, closing it after him.

The midnight street was silent and deserted.

The nervy fugitive slipped off his coat, folded it under his arm, set his crush hat at a little sharper angle on his head, brushed the dust from the knees of his trousers, then whisked off a false beard, thrust it into his pocket, and coolly descended the steps and walked away.

Thus the man in the Inverness coat vanished forever.

At precisely the same moment Sheridan Keene came over the back alley fence.

He easily had noted where his man left the railway tracks. On the right embankment, directly opposite, there was a lofty red signal lantern.

Keene barely had gained the alley when the gate of one of the near yards was quickly

opened and a burly policeman rushed upon him with drawn club, and crowded him down against the fence.

"Surrinder, ye spalpeen!" he roared, with genuine Celtic belligerence. "Be gob! ye're took now, and took for kapes! Put down them hands, or I'll be after——"

"Let me up! What the devil——"

"Put them down, I say, or I'll crack ye on the nob wid me blackthorn! Sure, it's no whisp av a Sheridan Keene that has ye now in his grasp. Away wid ye, Biddy, and call back the detective. Be off, now, and tell him I've nailed his man for him. I'll wait a bit in the kitchen while ye bring him."

Though hot with rage, Keene now grasped the whole situation, and saw the speediest way out of his brief dilemma.

"I surrender, Casey," he cried, quickly. "Let me up!"

"Devil a up," growled Casey, whose two-hundred pounds were still crushing Keene to the fence. "Devil a up till I've clapped these darbies on ye. It's a grased pig ye are, if ye gave Keene the slip; but yer'll not fool Mike Casey so aizy."

"It's not necessary to fool a fool," said Keene, sternly.

"Phat's that you say?"

"Put up those bracelets, Officer Casey, and listen to me! I am an inspector of police, Sheridan Keene himself, and in pursuit of the man who evidently gave you my name. He has made an ass of both of us!"

Casey involuntarily felt of his ears.

"There's my badge," cried Keene, angrily. "Feel of it, if you cannot see. Take me into the house at once, or you'll find yourself without a commission! What are you doing out back here, anyway?"

The voice of the detective now had an authority which the patrolman was not slow to recognize, and Keene began to vaguely suspect his own blunder. Yet, without losing his grasp on the detective's arm, he led him through the yard and into the kitchen.

"Now, Casey, what do you say?" sternly demanded Keene, when the light fell on his face.

The burly Irishman instantly dropped his arm, and fell back in great consternation.

"Phat the devil can I say, sor?" he re-

joined. "Sure, I couldn't tell 'twas you in the dark, not being a cat! As for the other blackguard, faith, you're as like to turn up looking loike him as loike yerself. So, how did I know 'twasn't you that was him? And in the agerness to do me juty——"

"That will do, Casey," Keene interposed, with less austerity. "We have both been egregiously fooled, and by some infernal sharp fellow."

"Bedad, sor, little doubt of that!"

"By thus delaying me he has given me the slip for a time," said Keene; "but I'll yet run him to earth. Did he enter this house?"

"Sure he did, sor."

"What did he say?"

"He walked right in, big as life, he did. 'T'm Sheridan Keene,' sez he, 'and I am after a man,' sez he, 'who has kilt some poor divil in the hotel over yonder.'

"He said his name was Sheridan Keene, did he?"

"Thim were his own blessed words."

"Then he must know me by sight, and that I was the man in pursuit of him."

"Be gob, sor, he knew my name, too! For he called me Officer Casey, and told me to put up me club."

"Then he can be no very great stranger about here, since he could speak both of our names. Which way did he go?"

"Straight up through the house, sor."

"Did he appear to know the way?"

"Sure, he'd not even let Biddy show him."

"Ah, is that so!" exclaimed Keene. "Where are the stairs?"

"They're out this way, sir," cried the servant, who was now returning. "Sure, Mr. Casey, I can't see anything of the other man."

"Never mind, Biddy. Wan's enough."

"Did the stranger appear to have any difficulty in locating these stairs?" Keene now demanded, pausing at a turn in the narrow entry from which they ascended.

"Not a bit, sir," declared the girl. "I saw him turn right up as if he knew all about them."

"Show me the way to the front door," said Keene, sharply. "Follow me, Casey."

Not to be long duped seriously, the shrewd detective was already picking up new threads and turning his mishap to an advantage.

The nerve and cunning displayed by the party in an Inverness coat convinced him that he was in pursuit of a man of more than ordinary intelligence and sagacity.

The detective knew that he would not have remained in the house, and the fact that he had come from the basement with such ease and celerity indicated that he might be familiar with the construction of the several houses in that locality.

"Come down here, Casey!" commanded Keene, already on the sidewalk. "And you, girl, secure the doors that we left open out back."

Keene then waited till the girl had closed the door, when he turned to Casey and said, sharply:

"Now, Officer Casey, listen to me."

"Yis, sor!"

"If I forget that I have found you off your beat to-night, make sure that you forget it also!"

"Bedad, sor, I will have no trouble doing that, thank you, sor," grinned the officer, eagerly saluting.

"See that you do, then."

"I will, sor."

"It will require that nothing shall be said of this house, nor of the man who passed through it. See that the mouth of that girl is properly closed."

"Faith, sor, I will. And, sure, it'll not be the first time, either!" cried Casey, smacking his lips.

"Be about it, then. And leave the other party to me."

CHAPTER III.

KEENE RECOVERS HIS MAN.

Though full of incidents, the pursuit had occupied only a very few minutes, and Keene now started to return to the hotel by the way of the street.

"I there may find some evidence of the assassin's identity," he commented.

In front of the house three doors below that from which he had emerged, Keene suddenly paused. His eye had caught sight of a doctor's sign affixed to the door—Roy Kendall, M. D.

Although it now was nearly midnight, the hall of the house was brilliantly lighted.

"Evidently he is up," said Keene to himself. "I'll take him along with me. There's the ghost of a chance that the girl is not dead."

He sprang up the steps, then stopped as if struck a blow between the eyes.

"By gracious!" he muttered; "here's a curious circumstance."

By looking straight through the hall of the doctor's house, and the rear window of the dining-room into which the hall led, Keene found himself staring squarely at the red signal light on the railway embankment, at the very point where the man in the Inverness coat had left the tracks.

It glared at him like a single blood red eye through the gloom of the doctor's dining-room. The sudden appearance of the light, with what had already happened, set Keene to thinking with amazing rapidity.

"It don't seem possible," he finally muttered. "Dr. Kendall stands ace high in his profession, and has money to burn. But I can ring him up, at all events, and need not betray my misgivings. If they are well-founded, his nerve surely will weaken when he claps his eyes on me."

Having thus concluded, Sheridan Keene pressed the electric bell.

The summons were quickly answered, and by the doctor himself. He came into the hall from the library, just back of the front parlor. He was tall and straight, about thirty-five years old, with mobile, clean-cut features, smoothly shaven. He was neatly attired in a quiet plaid suit, with a plush smoking-jacket in lieu of a coat.

Keene noted all this as he approached the door, then drew aside till the physician opened it. Then he stepped suddenly forward, saying:

"I want you, Dr. Kendall."

Surely that would floor him, if worthy of any suspicion, Keene had decided.

But Dr. Kendall's composed white countenance did not change by so much as a shadow.

"That so?" he said, quietly. "Are you sick?"

"Feel my pulse," said Keene, thrusting out his hand.

He was a bit nonplussed, but still artful, and his aim was to touch the doctor's hand.

"Feel your pulse, eh?" smiled Kendall, drawing back a little. "Step in, please. The night air is cold. Now I will do so."

He took Keene's wrist, and the shrewd detective instantly discovered not only that the doctor's fingers were slightly moist, but also that the edge of his wristband was slightly damp, and that his cuffs had been removed.

"He has been washing his hands," Keene instantly decided.

"Your pulse appears to be normal," Dr. Kendall now observed, looking him straight in the face. "A little rapid, perhaps; but that's nothing. Why do you ask about it? Don't you feel well?"

"I've had an awful shock, and I feared my heart might be off, by the way it has been jumping," Keene now explained, laughing.

"What kind of a shock?"

"There's been a murder committed in the hotel back here."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; I am sent to bring you around there. Can you come at once?"

"I can come if necessary, of course!" exclaimed Dr. Kendall, now regarding him very sharply. "Why didn't you say so in the first place? Is the victim dead?"

"I am not sure."

"Not sure?"

"No; I came away in a hurry."

"I will go round there with you, though if the person is dead I can be of no service. Step into the library while I slip on my coat and shoes."

Keene followed him as far as the threshold of the room mentioned. It was an elaborately furnished room, and in a large easy chair at one side of the centre table an attractive woman, in an old-rose tea-gown, sat sound asleep.

The aroma of a partly-smoked cigar was in the air, and the cigar itself, with bluish curls of smoke still rising from it, lay on a brass tray on the table. Near by an open book was turned, pages down, to keep the reader's place.

Were these the devices of a guilty man to

avert suspicion, or had Dr. Kendall really been sitting there with his wife, reading his book and enjoying his cigar?

Sheridan Keene was suspicious. He was puzzled also.

The doctor shook the woman by the shoulder.

"Wake up, Louise," he cried. "Wake up! you've slept long enough. It's time you retired."

Keene watched the woman as a cat watches a mouse.

"She's not feigning," he said to himself.

The doctor found it difficult to arouse her.

"What time is it?" she asked, drowsily.

"Nearly midnight. I've been called out to an accident. Come, come, stir yourself! Come up to your chamber with me, while I put on my shoes."

"Very—well."

"I'll detain you but a moment longer," the physician added to Keene, as he helped his wife from the room. "My shoes are up in my chamber."

"By gracious! I believe that woman has been drugged," thought Keene, as they passed him in the hall. "She looks and acts it. She doesn't even see me."

He watched the doctor urge her up the stairs, then he cast a swift glance about the hall. A tall mahogany closet stood against the wall under the stairs.

"I'll have a look at its contents!"

He stole across the broad entry, making sure that he was not watched from overhead, and softly opened the double doors of the closet.

Several coats and lady's garments hung within. He felt of them in succession. One, only, differed from all the rest. This was an Inverness top-coat.

It was a dozen degrees colder than any of the others!

"It has just been worn in from out of doors," muttered Keene, with an irrepressible thrill of joyous triumph. "The chill of the night air has not even had time to leave it. There's no question about it—I've nailed my man!"

These were the excited thoughts that now flashed through the brain of this clever detective.

But Sheridan Keene was not ready to make an arrest.

Not he!

"There are too many side issues," he reasoned, as he softly closed the closet doors. "Besides, my nervy doctor will not now resort to flight, for he doesn't think I suspect him."

"No, no! no arrest at present! I'll give him a loose line till I get on to his whole game."

"No doubt my two bad eggs at the hotel are in it also. If I keep on, I'll have a whole basketful."

"There's four of us in it, at least, since I'm now in it, too!"

With which dry conclusion to his mental review of the complicated situation Keene took the chance of discovery and slipped noiselessly through the doctor's dining-room to have a look out from the back windows.

The view discernible by the dim starlight further assured him that he was right. There was the row of back yards, the line of railway, the red signal lantern on the opposite embankment, while a hundred yards away rose the lofty rear elevation of the great hotel.

"It's plain enough now," said Keene to himself. "The man knew which way he was going. 'Twas a shrewd move, slipping through his neighbor's house and dodging into his own. No wonder he easily found the basement stairs, and his way to the front door."

The light from the kitchen windows streamed across the back yard of the third house away.

Two forms out near the gate caught the detective's eye.

Casey was kissing the servant girl good-night.

"Is that the way he closes her mouth?" thought Keene. "Well, well, I guess I may trust him to silence her, also, since his commission hangs on his obedience."

A heavy tread sounded on the floor above, and Keene now quickly slipped back to his place in the hall.

Dr. Kendall was just descending the stairs.

"All ready?" asked Keene, cheerfully.

"As soon as I get my case," replied Kendall with a nod, hastening into the library.

"You'll soon have another kind of a case on your hands," said Keene to himself, following him into the room.

"By the way, doctor," he then abruptly demanded, "who lives in the third house above here?"

The doctor looked up without a change of countenance, and squarely met the detective's indifferent gaze.

"I don't know the name of the people," he answered, readily, without a tremor in his voice, "They've recently moved in there."

"I just came through their house, in order to reach the door of yours," said Keene, with a laugh.

"How did that happen?"

"Well, the fact is, doctor, I am a detective, and happened to be in the hotel yonder when the crime was committed, and the assassin started to make his escape."

"Well, well, that was fortunate!"

"Yes, so 'twas! But I failed to get my man. He slipped out of the back door of the hotel, and led me a sharp chase down the tracks back here. Then he entered the yard of the third house above, and dodged through to the front street. He gave me the slip in that way."

"Well, that wasn't so fortunate," observed Dr. Kendall, with a curious smile.

"Well, I should say not."

"I don't happen to know who lives in the third house above. Didn't you have your gun with you? Why didn't you drop the man?"

"I did try it once and missed him. After that, he was too far ahead, and evaded me too quickly. If I had been sure——"

"Just let me get my overcoat, and we'll go along at once," interposed the physician, turning quickly to the hall. "May I ask your name, by the way?"

"Certainly," replied the detective, following him. "It is Sheridan Keene. I am one of the Boston inspectors."

"Ah, I've heard of you."

"Nothing bad, I hope?"

"Quite the contrary, I assure you. You have a rather enviable reputation as a detective," smiled the doctor, slipping into a

heavy frieze overcoat and putting on his hat. "Well, well," he added, leading the way toward the front door, "I really hope you'll succeed in running down the fellow, if a murder has indeed been committed. Now we're off, sir."

Keene slipped his hand through the physician's arm, as they started down the street, and found that there was not so much as a tremor in his erect and muscular figure.

Though accustomed to meeting men of courage, the nerve and audacity of this man utterly amazed him.

Keene expressed his sentiments in the one terse thought that quickly flashed through his mind:

"It's deucedly lucky that I already have him in my power!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

Sheridan Keene had several motives in not arresting Dr. Kendall at once.

He wanted more conclusive evidence against him. What already had happened, told him that he was up against a remarkably clever man, who had thus far laid his plans with extraordinary acumen.

Keene would take no chance of being fooled at the finish as he had been at the start.

He had decided, moreover, that the two men at the hotel were suspicious characters, and that the game he had heard them mention might have involved even the life of the girl he had seen in their company, and afterward beheld dead on the floor of the private dining-room.

Sheridan Keene wanted to make dead sure of the whole business, and the whole gang.

This was the reason why he frankly had disclosed himself to Dr. Kendall, as stated. He did so in order that Kendall might feel that he was not suspected, and the ruse had worked like a charm.

Just fifteen minutes from the time Keene had started down the back stairs in pursuit of the man in the Inverness coat he and Dr. Roy Kendall again entered the hotel in company, like genuine good friends.

It was an extraordinary situation to have developed so quickly.

A great crowd was in the hotel office and parlors, but several policemen had cleared the corridors near the room in which the tragedy had occurred.

"Make way there, you people!" one of them cried, who now saw Keene approaching. "Let those gentlemen pass."

"It's Sheridan Keene!" exclaimed an observer. "It's the detective!"

And then all necks were craned to get a glimpse of the noted officer, whose duties became so grave and important at such a time.

Keene quickly led the way toward the private dining-room.

An officer was now on guard at the door.

"How long have you been here, Norton?" Keene sharply demanded, as he approached.

"I came a few minutes after the crime was discovered," replied the policeman.

"What have you done?"

"Only telephoned to headquarters, sir."

"Has the chief been up?"

"He said you were here, sir, and would take charge of the case. I've been waiting for you to show up."

"Very good!" exclaimed Keene. "Is the woman dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any investigation been made?"

"None by an officer, sir," replied the policeman. "But there's an English doctor inside, who has examined the body. He says she is dead."

"Go send Ferguson for the medical examiner, and then come back here," Keene said, sharply. "Come in, Dr. Kendall."

And the two men entered the fatal room.

It was a small but elaborate private dining-room.

A single window, directly opposite the door, opened upon the street, and was about six feet above the sidewalk.

In the middle of the room was a square table, laid for dinner. The remnants of the viands still were upon it, with a partly empty glass of wine. A dainty candelabra adorned the table.

On a chair at one side was the woman's opera cloak and hat, and on the floor stood

a pail of ice, from which protruded a bottle of champagne.

The body of the victim lay upon the floor near the table. Her neck and breast were stained with blood from a wound under her right ear. It was plain at a glance that the woman was dead.

The only other occupants of the room were the colored waiter, Dr. Yardley, and the man called Moreland. The last two were seated; the waiter was standing near the window.

Keene took in all these features at a glance.

They were the very persons he wanted under his eye at that moment.

Yet he did not show the slightest sign of suspecting any one of them.

Dr. Kendall bent above the body, then uttered a sudden cry:

"Good God! this girl is Miss Russell!" he exclaimed.

"Then you know her?" demanded Keene.

"She and her mother are old friends of mine. Merciful heavens, this is dreadful!"

"Is she dead?"

"Yes, yes," cried Dr. Kendall, with a perfectly natural display of emotion and dismay. "One of the arteries of her neck has been severed with some sharp instrument. What an appalling crime! Poor girl, poor girl! The body is still warm."

He knelt above her while speaking, and turned his back to the detective in a way that concealed his manipulation of the woman's body.

Then he hurriedly examined the wound, nervously fingering her throat, and starting slightly when he did so; and, finally, he went so far as to thrust one of his fingers deep in her mouth. Evidently he discovered something extraordinary, for he suddenly turned as pale, for a moment, as the snowy table cloth near which he was kneeling.

Though Keene did not see this, it caught the crafty eyes of Dr. Yardley, who sat across the room and had been watching him.

The smooth, oily face of the English physician, despite his usual self-command, underwent a change that betrayed his intense amazement. He checked this instantly, however, and pretended that he did not observe it.

But Keene's watchful eyes had not failed to notice both changes.

"What do you find, Dr. Kendall?" he asked, quietly.

"That I can be of no service here, Detective Keene. This woman is dead, sir, and only the district medical examiner can authorize her removal."

"I have sent for him."

"Then I will return home," said Kendall, drying his hands. "I really am deeply shocked, sir. This young woman was once a very dear friend of mine, though I have not seen her for several years until now. Better far had I never seen her thus!"

Again Keene caught a curious change in the expression of Yardley's face. But he knew how to bide his time.

"Is she a Boston woman?" he asked of Dr. Kendall.

"She and her mother once lived here, but have, for some years, been in Europe."

"Wealthy?"

"I believe so."

"Any relatives here?"

"I think they are alone in the world."

"Do you know when they returned from Europe?"

"I saw by the Saturday paper that they had just arrived. That is all I know about them."

"Then they have not called on you since their arrival?"

Kendall haughtily drew up his fine figure and frowned.

"I said I had not seen the woman for years till now," he replied, with some feeling.

"Ah, I'd forgotten that," Keene observed, dryly.

"Perhaps I can give you all the information you require, Detective Keene," Yardley now remarked, coming forward.

Keene eyed him sharply.

"And who are you, sir?"

"My card, sir. Do me the honor."

And Yardley bowed and grinned with malicious complacency, and produced a bit of pasteboard.

"Dr. Cyrus Yardley, eh?"

"At your service, Detective Keene!"

"And what do you know about this girl?"

"I have been this poor girl's companion,

and her mother's medical attendant, for several months, sir. With my friend, Lord Moreland, yonder, who is of the English nobility, we have been traveling in Europe. We arrived here on the *Cephalonia* last Saturday. This crime is utterly inexplicable!"

"Why do you think so?" demanded Keene, observing the strange and steady stare Kendall was bestowing on the English physician, and suspecting at once that some secret communication might be going on between them.

"Why, why, sir," protested Yardley, with servile politeness. "I know of no person who can have desired this girl's death. Nor does her mother, who now is utterly prostrated, and bereft of reason, even."

"What brought her to this country again?"

"A matter of property."

"What do you know about this crime, Dr. Yardley?"

"Only what my eyes have told me."

"Well, what have your eyes told you?"

"I had occasion to seek Miss Russell, whom I supposed was in the hotel drawing-room. Not finding her, I came through this corridor to ask yonder waiter if he had seen her."

"Where was he at that time?"

"In the corridor."

"Go on."

"He said he did not know where she was. While questioning him, I heard the sound of blows and a struggle in this room, and attempted to enter. The waiter stopped me, and ordered me to keep out."

"The door was locked, sah," cried the negro.

"It is true the door was locked, Detective Keene," admitted Yardley. "I then went out to the sidewalk and looked in the window."

"What did you see?"

"This girl bleeding and dying on the floor, and a man making ready to effect his escape."

"What was he doing?"

"Listening at the door. Then he caught sight of me, and at once opened it and ran. I immediately threw open the window and gave the alarm."

Keene looked him sharply in the eye.

"Could you identify the murderer, if you saw him?" he demanded.

"Oh, easily!" exclaimed Yardley. "I'd know him by his beard."

"Beards can be removed, sir," rejoined Keene. "Did you find the girl dead when you came in through the window?"

"Yes, sir; she had breathed her last."

Keene swung around to the waiter.

"What's your name, my man?" he demanded, earnestly.

"Samuel Johnson, sah."

"Why did you tell Dr. Yardley not to enter this room?"

"'Cause, sah, Miss Russell done tolle me to see she wasn't disturbed, sah."

"Did you know Miss Russell was in there?"

"Yes, sah."

"Did you tell Dr. Yardley that you did not know where she was?"

"Yes, sah."

"Why did you lie about it?"

"I done tolle him that, sah, 'cause Miss Russell done tipped me to see that no possum diskivered she was in here, sah. Dat's why I done it, sah."

"Did she plan that with you before coming here?"

"Yes, sah; she done do dat berry t'ing, sah. She done get me to have dinner already and on de table, sah, so she could slip in here after de op'ra, sah, to meet a gen'lum friend, sah."

"That was all prearranged, was it?"

"Yes, sah."

"And you were to aid her in this deception?"

"Yes, sah; dat's the berry way ob it."

"Did you see the man arrive?"

"I done see him slip into de room, sah. Miss Russell, she came next, sah, and locked de door."

"Then she appeared anxious to meet this man, who terminated the interview by cutting her throat?"

"She done seem so, sah."

Keene knew the waiter was telling the truth. He had seen enough to convince him of that. He knew also that neither Yardley nor Moreland could have had any active part in the crime.

"It's a mysterious case!" he observed, bluntly.

"Extraordinary!" murmured Dr. Yardley.

"Unaccountable!" said Kendall, who had waited to see how this inquiry turned.

Keene looked them all over once more.

He realized that there was a great mystery here.

He also knew that it could not be solved then and there.

Much work must be done, and the cleverest kind of detective work, to get the truth from such men as these.

"Dr. Yardley," he said, sharply. "Take me up to Mrs. Russell's chamber."

For a moment Yardley turned pale.

Sheridan Keene instantly detected the change.

"Why do you hesitate?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Russell is very ill, sir," protested the physician.

"Likely to die?"

"Very!"

"All the more reason, then, why I should see her at once. If you are her physician, take me to her room."

"I am ready."

"Lead the way."

"One moment!" cried Dr. Kendall. "Am I wanted here any longer?"

Keene quickly shook his head, saying:

"No, doctor; you were very kind to come at all. The medical examiner will presently be here, and I shall give the affair to him."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night, doctor."

And Keene shook his hand, wondering how long before he should slip a manacle around that firm and muscular wrist.

"Now, Dr. Yardley!"

The smooth, crafty-eyed physician preceded the detective from the room.

Sheridan Keene said only this to the officer at the door:

"Norton, order those other two men out of the room, and wait here for the medical examiner. Tell him I've completed my investigation here, and to give you his instructions. Have the body removed to the rooms of an undertaker. I shall not return here to-night."

"Very well, sir," and the officer touched his helmet.

The detective turned again to the English physician. He now was more than ever convinced that this man was a crafty and unscrupulous knave, despite his smooth exterior.

"Now, Dr. Yardley," he said, sharply, "lead the way."

In a few moments the two men entered a sumptuous suite on the third floor. In the parlor two ladies, guests of the house, were seated.

One was Mrs. Paget.

She quickly arose, asking anxiously:

"Is there any news, Dr. Yardley? Has the assassin been discovered?"

Yardley rubbed his hands, and glanced out of the corner of his eye at the detective. He knew even better than Sheridan Keene who the man was that had met Stella Russell that fatal evening.

"Ask this officer, Mrs. Paget," he said, obsequiously.

"An officer?"

"Detective Keene."

"The criminal has not been discovered," said Keene, with his eyes open for every sign of a clew.

"It seems so strange, so very strange!" exclaimed Mrs. Paget.

"In what way?" demanded Keene.

"That this girl should have been murdered by a friend."

"Why do you say friend?"

"Because Miss Russell came to me about fifteen minutes before she was found dead, sir, and asked me to do her a favor. She said she wished to meet a gentleman friend on the sly, and asked that I would not say where she had gone."

"She spoke of the man as a gentleman friend, did she?"

"Those were her very words, sir."

"Did she say why she wished to meet him?"

"Only with her eyes, sir. They were very bright, and she seemed very eager for the meeting."

Keene turned to Yardley.

"Take me to the girl's mother!" he commanded.

The physician led the way to an adjoining bedroom.

The elderly woman, whom Keene had seen an hour previous waiting for the elevator, lay in bed.

She was in a state of semi-consciousness, and moaning piteously.

Keene glanced at Yardley. The doctor had grown very pale.

"Are you going to speak to her?" he demanded, in a whisper.

"Why do you ask, sir?" Keene sternly inquired.

"Because the woman is not in her right mind," protested the physician. "She may say things which——"

He was interrupted by a terrific scream.

The thrilling intensity of it fairly chilled the detective's blood.

The woman had started up in bed, and was pointing her finger at the shrinking figure of the English physician, who now had turned ghastly white.

"Take him away!" she shrieked, in the violence of blind frenzy. "Take him away! It's his doings! It's all his doings! Take him away! out of my room—out of my sight! It's all his doings! My daughter—lay her death to him! Take him away! Take him away!"

The mere presence of the doctor seemed to drive the woman to madness.

Keene saw at a glance that she was delirious.

He saw, too, that Yardley was as white as a corpse, and shrinking toward the door.

With an ugly look in his eye, Keene seized him by the shoulder and dragged him from the room and out into the corridor.

"Tell me what she means by those words, Dr. Yardley!" he commanded, sternly.

Yardley now showed his true colors.

With an angry movement, he threw off the detective's hand. His face was no longer smooth, but was convulsed with passion, and his narrow eyes were ablaze with evil fire.

"You know what she meant as well as I do," he cried, angrily. "Don't you lay your hand on me again! If you do, you'll get in trouble!"

"Tell me what she implied?" repeated Keene, ignoring his threatening looks.

"Great Scott! How do I know what she implied," cried Yardley. "The woman is out of her head. If you think I know what she meant, Detective Keene, find it out in your own way, sir."

"That's just what I mean to do."

"Get to work, then, as soon as you like," retorted Yardley. "I am not able to tell you, and I will put up with no more of your infernal insolence. You can find me right here in this house any time that you want me. Good-night, sir."

And Yardley boldly strode away, with his short, fat figure shaken with passion.

Sheridan Keene let him go.

He was not yet ready to take the aggressive.

Yardley strode down-stairs to the office, and then back to the room which he occupied in company with Moreland.

The latter was getting ready for bed. His grim face was flushed and sullen. He received the physician with a growl.

"So it's all off, is it?" he demanded, with a sneer, when Yardley entered. "Here's a pretty mess, with the game ended on a dead card."

Yardley snapped his fingers and laughed loudly.

"Not ended, Moreland, my boy!" he exclaimed, cheerfully. "Only a new deal!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say."

"Isn't the game queered by the girl's death?"

"Far from it," grinned the doctor, pouring a drink from a decanter on the sideboard,

"Tell me what you mean?" cried Moreland, with a frown.

Yardley swung round from the sideboard and surveyed him with malicious delight.

"I mean that the game is not ended by the death of the girl, simply because I've discovered the party who killed her."

"The deuce you have!"

"It's a fact, Morley, my boy; and he's now in our power, and the one we must bleed. You see, it's only a change of sex."

"But who is the man?" cried Morley, now so called, in rising excitement.

"Who do you think?"

"I've no idea. Tell me who?"

"The chap who came in with Keene," cried Yardley, with a great display of enthusiasm.

"Oh, I know," he added, observing his companion's doubtful look. "You can leave it all to me, Jimmy Morley. He has fooled the detective, but I'm blessed if he ever saw the day that he was able to fool me. We have him dead to rights, Jimmy, and the game has just begun."

CHAPTER V.

KEENE OPENS HIS TWO BAD EGGS.

Sheridan Keene reported early to Chief Watts next morning, and for an hour or more the mysterious case was thoroughly discussed.

"The features of it are extraordinary!" the chief exclaimed, when Keene had carefully presented them from beginning to end.

"I never struck a darker case," declared Keene; "despite that I am perfectly sure of the identity of the criminals. It is how they are related that puzzles me; and only the fact that Dr. Kendall has so carefully prepared to beat the law, in case of arrest, has withheld me from taking him into custody."

"You think you have not yet sufficient evidence to convict him?"

"I know I have not."

"Is it purely circumstantial?"

"Entirely so."

"And you think he has prepared himself to refute it by counter-evidence."

"Precisely."

"Then there is but one thing to be done. The man must be left at large, and you must get the whole truth without his suspecting that you are so engaged."

"That is my idea."

"Can you accomplish it?"

"I can try."

"Superficially, it appears that Stella Russell was willing to meet him."

"There's no doubt about that, chief. She ordered the dinner and tipped the waiter, so that she could have this secret meeting with Kendall."

"You must discover what her object was."

"Her lips are sealed."

"But Dr. Kendall can disclose it."

"That is true. And I will have it out of him before I am done with him," said Keene, decisively.

"Now about Dr. Yardley and this man Moreland. Can you learn anything definite about them?"

"Only what the doctor has stated. They are registered at the hotel all right, and appear to be what they represent."

"Have you been there this morning?"

"I just came from there."

"How is Mrs. Russell?"

"Very low, indeed."

"Who is attending her?"

"Dr. Jones, who has rooms in the house."

"What does he say?"

"That there is only a bare chance of her recovery."

"Is she conscious?"

Keene shook his head.

"She knows nothing," he replied; "and has been failing steadily since last night. I left word for the nurse to question her concerning Yardley, if she should at any time revive."

Chief Watts nodded approvingly.

"It will be unfortunate if she dies without having made some statement relative to these two men. There seems to be absolutely no evidence against them except her delirious remarks, and what you overheard in the smoking-room. I don't think we have any hold at all upon them."

"None whatever, chief."

"It is absolutely certain that they had no active part in the crime."

"Quite so," said Sheridan Keene. "There may be some collusion between them and Dr. Kendall. Now I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"Why not cable to Scotland Yard, and make an inquiry about these fellows?" suggested the detective.

"That is a good idea. We will send a message at once."

"We should get an answer back by noon."

"Surely."

The message was drawn up at once and forwarded, and the answer came in the early afternoon.

Keene was in the chief's office when it arrived.

It read:

"Yardley bad. Sentenced once, malpractice. Don't know Moreland. Try Morley, No. 2,117. Not now in London. Morley wanted."

Keene started up in some excitement when the chief read this concise response to their inquiries.

It told these experienced servants of the law much more than an ordinary observer could have discovered between the lines.

"So, so!" exclaimed Chief Watts, with manifest satisfaction. "This Yardley is evidently a physician of ill repute in London, and has once done time for criminal malpractice."

"Precisely," cried Keene, triumphantly. "I was absolutely sure I was not mistaken in the man's character."

"They don't know of any Lord Moreland," continued Chief Watts.

"There's probably no such title conferred."

"Evidently not."

"Look up No. 2,117 in the gallery."

Keene hastened to the great cabinet, which occupies one side of the chief's private office, and which bears across its face the significant words:

"BERTILLON SYSTEM OF MEASUREMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS."

It is the modernized "Rogues' Gallery."

It contains to-day the photographs and histories of nearly all the notorious criminals of the present generation.

At the end of five minutes Sheridan Keene drew forth a card from one of the numerous drawers.

"Here it is, Chief Watts," he cried. "And here's the very man!"

The card contained an excellent photograph, front and profile, of one James Morley, at that time posing in Boston as Lord Moreland, "a worthy sprig of the English nobility."

Chief Watts turned his grave eyes upon the signaletic card, covered with abridged writing, and read certain portions of the felon's history thereupon printed.

"James Morley, born Feb. 12th, 1864, in London; Smiggle's court. Profession, swin-

dler and general thief. Convictions, 3. Last imprisoned in Newgate, for petty larceny. Dresses well and frequents respectable localities to ply his trade. Desperate when cornered. Slight cockney accent when in anger."

Chief Watts returned the card with a satisfied smile.

"There you are, Detective Keene!" he exclaimed.

"With my two bad eggs very nicely opened," cried Keene, laughing.

"I should say so! The Russells have been traveling about with two very refined and estimable characters."

"They probably have been most outrageously imposed upon."

"I guess there is no doubt about that," said Chief Watts. "But what do you now think about Dr. Kendall's being in collusion with the scoundrels?"

"I confess that I am more than ever puzzled."

"Nevertheless, the puzzle must be solved!"

"Chief!" cried Keene, starting to his feet, "you leave me to solve it!"

CHAPTER VI.

A STROKE OF LUCK.

About five o'clock that evening an old gentleman, with gray hair and neatly trimmed mustache and beard, ascended the steps of Dr. Kendall's residence and rang the bell. By his looks and general air of refinement he might have been a prosperous clergyman.

The man was Sheridan Keene, however, disguised in perhaps his most artistic fashion.

He wanted a talk with Dr. Kendall in another character than that of an officer; and though aware that he should not probably find the physician at home much before six, he had not come early without a motive. He wanted a word or two with the doctor's wife also.

By calling early he could kill two birds with one stone.

He did not dream, however, of dropping four by a stroke of almost unparalleled good luck.

As he rang the bell a lad in livery opened

the door. He had a letter in his hand, and evidently was about being started on an errand by a woman then standing in the hall, whom Keene at once saw to be the physician's wife.

"Is the doctor, or Mrs. Kendall, at home, my son?" Keene inquired of the lad, addressing him with paternal kindness, yet sufficiently loud that the woman should hear.

"The doctor is not, sir; but Mrs.——"

"I am Mrs. Kendall, sir," said the lady, coming to the door. "Will you walk in?"

She looked at him with inquiring eyes, and was favorably impressed with the gentleman's clerical appearance. She was a tall and dignified woman, with a pretty face; yet a certain thinness of her lips indicated her a person of pronounced sentiments and very strong will.

"Thank you, madam," said Keene, bowing himself into the hall and thence to the doctor's reception-room, where the lady invited him to a seat.

"Do you wish to see Dr. Kendall?" she added.

"I wish to see him, though not professionally."

"He will come in from his round of calls about six, sir. Can I be of any service?"

"Very possibly, thank you," said Keene, bowing. "I am the Rev. Caleb Patterson, assistant rector of St. Elwin's Church. I wish to inquire about two persons with whom I understand Dr. Kendall is acquainted. Would I be likely to find him here in the evening?"

"Oh, yes! My husband is invariably at home evenings, sir."

Keene did not tell her she was mistaken, but remarked, blandly:

"I might have spoken to him last night, had I then been informed as fully as now. I caught a glimpse of him at the Gage reception last evening."

"Beg pardon!" exclaimed Mrs. Kendall, with a look of surprise.

"What did you observe?"

"Excuse me! I understood you to say that you saw Dr. Kendall at the Gage reception."

"Yes, so I did," Keene nodded, affably.

"But he was not there, sir."

"Aren't you mistaken?"

"Indeed, I am not," she rejoined, with some slight show of asperity. "My husband was here the entire evening. I sat with him in the library from dinner until midnight. He then went out in response to a call."

Keene smiled to himself, but did not contradict her. He now was perfectly satisfied that his impression of the previous night was correct. For some reason, Dr. Kendall had drugged his wife in order to make that hurried visit to the hotel.

"I must have been mistaken, Mrs. Kendall, in that case," he replied, blandly. "No doubt I am. My eyes are getting old along with the rest of me."

"About whom have you called to inquire, sir? Perhaps I can inform you."

"My mission is one connected with our church work," observed Keene, with dry suavity. "I wish to learn something about one Miss Russell, the unfortunate girl who—"

"I beg your pardon, sir!" Mrs. Kendall hurriedly interposed, quickly rising. "I really can give you no information about that woman. You'll have to consult my husband."

Keene looked up at her with an assumption of grave surprise.

"Are you not acquainted with the lady, then?" he asked, blandly.

"Indeed I am not! I know of her only as an old flame of my husband. Perhaps he can enlighten you concerning her. I certainly cannot."

And Mrs. Kendall, with an ugly look in her eyes, turned toward the door.

"Jealous almost to madness, though she who once was a rival now lies cold in death!"

This was the thought that went through Keene's mind, yet he said, merely:

"I presume I may wait here till your husband comes in, Mrs. Kendall?"

"Certainly, sir," she bowed, coldly, turning back for a moment. "I regret that my duties, however, necessitate my leaving you alone. You can make yourself quite at home, sir."

And the woman, irritated well-nigh to discourtesy by a mere reference to something of the past, haughtily left the room.

Keene smiled as he heard her ascend the stairs, and noisily close her chamber door.

"The mix-up begins to clear a little," he said to himself, in a congratulatory spirit. "My nervy doctor evidently is under his wife's thumb, and was compelled to give her knock-out drops in order to slip away unsuspected to his former love."

"I'd like to see his face when she tells him what I told her."

"Ah, well, he is quite capable of lying out of it. And since I have admitted I was mistaken, he will easily—"

The muffled sound of a bell close behind him ended the detective's train of thought. He turned sharply to see whence it came.

"Ah, the telephone call!" he exclaimed.

The instrument was on the wall in one corner of the room, and was contained in a portable closet with a closed door.

Evidently Mrs. Kendall was irritable, and did not enjoy that the frequent ringing should be heard all over the house.

It rang again.

The boy employed there to answer it, along with his other duties, had just been sent out of the house.

It rang again.

Then, as no person came to respond to the summons, Keene decided he would answer the call himself.

"I, at least, can say that the doctor is out," he thought, as he stepped into the closet and closed the door.

"Hello!" he called over the wire.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the girl operator at the central office. "Had you fallen asleep? All ready, 721."

Then Keene heard over the wire:

"Hello, hello! Is this Dr. Kendall's office?"

Keene started as if a needle had been thrust into him, yet felt a thrill of exultation from head to foot.

There was no mistaking that smooth, oily voice, despite wire and distance.

The man at the other end was Dr. Yardley.

Instantly closing the closet door more tightly, the detective counterfeited Kendall's voice as nearly as possible, and called back:

"Yes, yes; this is Dr. Kendall's office. Who are you?"

"Is the doctor there?" came the inquiry.

Cool as a cucumber, yet with every nerve on the *qui vive*, Keene quietly answered:

"Yes, I am Dr. Kendall. Who are you?"

"I am a man who wants to see you alone this evening at eight o'clock."

"What name, sir?"

"Never mind the name. You'll know me well enough when you see me."

"What do you mean, sir? I don't understand such a summons."

"You'll understand it all right, doctor, when the time comes. Don't leave that wire till I am through with you. If you do you'll wish you never was born."

Keene had no idea of leaving it, for this was one of the richest things he ever had struck. It was so good he could hardly contain himself. Both ends of the game were playing fairly into his hands.

He weighed his responses with hurried consideration, lest he should betray himself, and aimed to invite the other's disclosure. It was a delicate task, owing to his ignorance of Yardley's relations with Kendall; but Keene was not a man to lose his head.

"I am at home evenings," he rejoined.

"I don't want to visit your house."

"Why not?"

"You can easily guess why, if you try."

"I am no clairvoyant," returned Keene.
"What are you driving at?"

"There is a certain party who may be watching me," replied Yardley. "If he was to see me entering your house, he might form suspicions which you would not find wholly agreeable."

"I reckon I can guess who he means," chuckled Keene, within himself.

"Are you there?" demanded Yardley, impatiently.

"Oh, yes, I am here," replied Keene. "But I am not likely to remain long, unless you state your business."

"You'll stay until I say go, doctor."

"Will I?"

"If you don't you'll wish you had. I must see you to-night at eight o'clock. My business relates to a recent event in which you played a very important part. It's all for your sake that I am so careful about approaching you. Now, do you understand?"

Keene lighted upon this at once. It was a key to part of the strange situation. It now was evident that Yardley had discovered Kendall to have been the murderer of Stella Russell, and that the English physician believed Kendall did not think himself suspected.

In that case, Keene instantly decided that they were not confederates. "I believe this scoundrel is about to attempt to blackmail."

"What do you say?" cried Yardley, with greater impatience.

"I am waiting for you to say," replied the detective. "Tell me who you are?"

"I will put it like this, since you are determined to have it: I am a man who saw you looking for something last night which you did not find. Now are you on?"

It was a puzzler, but Keene dodged him by saying:

"The short one?"

"Precisely!"

"What do you want of me?"

"You ought to know; but, if you don't understand, and won't understand, I'll make it plain enough when we meet," cried Yardley, with an uglier voice.

Keene hesitated for a moment, to give the impression that he was considering the situation, then demanded:

"Where do you want me to meet you?"

"Name your own place, but let the hour be eight o'clock."

"Am I taking any chances by complying?"

"None whatever! Your danger lies in refusing to comply."

"Is that so? In what way?"

"Don't be fool enough to ask me such questions over a wire," cried Yardley. "If you are wise, you will wait till you see me."

"I will not consent to meet you except in disguise," Keene now said, decisively. "I will not chance being seen with you."

"Come as you like, so be it you come."

"At eight o'clock?"

"Precisely! Name the place!"

"The doorway of No. 12 Akron court."

"Is that a house?"

"It's a vacant shop which I own, and I now have the key."

"That will suit me," said Yardley. "Do not fail to be there at the hour mentioned, for I'll not hang about to wait for you. If you're not there, mark this: I'll blow the whole business."

"Do nothing before seeing me!" Keene quickly cried, assuming a tone of appeal.

"I will go you to that extent."

"Then expect me at eight."

And the detective rang off the wire.

Sheridan Keene now decided there was no need of an immediate interview with Dr. Kendall. If he should personate the latter in an interview with Yardley, the entire mystery might at once be solved. With a determination to undertake this, Keene softly opened the front door and immediately left the house.

When Dr. Kendall entered, nearly an hour later, he found awaiting him, not a disguised member of the detective force, but a professional call received ten minutes earlier by his office boy, and entered on his slate.

It was marked urgent—and it came from No. 18 Akron court!

Yet Dr. Kendall did not respond to this call until after he had finished his dinner.

CHAPTER VII.

CAUGHT IN A BOX.

At precisely eight o'clock that evening Detective Keene stood leaning in the doorway of No. 12 Akron court.

The building was a wooden structure near several small dwellings. It was in a blind street not far from Dr. Kendall's residence, and on a portion of the made land of the Back Bay, as yet not much built upon. It had lately been used for a carpenter's shop, and in making it a rendezvous, Keene had known that he easily could obtain the key from the owner, who was a personal friend.

The detective had a motive in naming this sequestered and gloomy locality. His facial features did not resemble closely those of Dr. Kendall, and, though he had informed Yardley that he should wear a disguise, an imperfect light was vitally necessary to so daring an assumption as that contemplated.

He wore an overcoat like that of Dr. Kendall, however, and a pointed beard similar to that worn by the latter the previous night. Under these combined conditions Keene believed he could artfully work the dodge. He would have succeeded, moreover, but for one utterly unexpected contingency—the doctor's urgent call that evening on a patient in Akron court.

Keene had waited only a few minutes, when he saw Yardley approaching with his companion of the previous night, Jimmy Morley. They at first acted as if somewhat suspicious, but at a low whistle from the detective, they quickly drew nearer.

"You are on time!" exclaimed Yardley, who was closely muffled in a heavy overcoat.

"I said I would be here at eight," replied Keene, in dissatisfied tones.

"What did you wear the lilacs for?" demanded Morley, dropping into a low slang habitual to him under such circumstances.

"Was you afeard some guy'd turn wise to yer along with us?"

"I told you how I should come."

"It don't matter about that," interposed Yardley, impatiently. "Have you a key to this place?"

"Here is one. I will unlock the door. I have only just arrived here!"

"Do you own the shop?"

"My wife does," replied Keene. "I have the letting of it. Come in, if you like."

"What is the place?" demanded Morley, following the others into the gloomy interior.

His dry, rasping voice and cautious manner were not encouraging. He appeared suspicious and restless, glaring like a cat about the empty room, of which only the faint outlines of the several windows were plainly discernible.

Keene hastened to reassure him.

"It was let to a carpenter until last week, when he vacated," said he. "You can feel the shavings under your feet. I am sure I can find a lantern."

"I can give you light enough for our business," growled Morley, quickly producing a pocket lantern and throwing the slide. "There's less need for eyes here to-night than for tongues and ears, my gallus doctor."

"What is this business?" demanded Keene, adapting himself as best he could to the blind situation.

"It can be quickly stated," said Yardley, signing for his confederate to close the street door.

"State it, then! The sooner the better."

"There is time enough, now that we have you here," returned Yardley. "You don't know much of us, Dr. Kendall, and we don't know much of you; but you queered a pretty game of ours by your crime of last evening, and have taken a very snug fortune out of our pockets. In a nut-shell, Kendall,

you must make good the loss we have suffered."

"To what crime do you refer? I am guilty of no crime."

"Don't play the innocent with me, for it will not wash," cried Yardley. "You know, and I know, that you killed Stella Russell last evening."

"Aye, sir, we all three know it!" put in Morley, drawing nearer, with a threatening swagger. "We have proof enough 'twas you that slit the pipes of the young loidy. And now you'll come down 'andsome, and make us good, or you'll take a dance i' the air! That's precisely 'ow the matter stands, my covey."

"How do you know I killed her?" demanded Keene, who could not understand how they had made the discovery that Kendall was the criminal.

"Never mind how we know," cried Yardley. "You fooled Keene, the detective, but you cannot gammon me."

"How did I fool Keene?"

"By turning up like an innocent man, after having made your escape. Oh, that was clever enough, Dr. Kendall, but I still have the call on you. I knew the moment you touched the girl's throat that 'twas you who had been there. I have the evidence that places you in my power, and you must settle, or face exposure."

"What evidence—"

"Never mind that! You know what it is, and so do I."

Keene changed his tactics. It was evident that Yardley possessed information of which he was ignorant, and saw no occasion for imparting it to a man he believed to be Kendall. The detective drew himself up and pretended to make a bluff.

"Well, since you think you have the bulge on me, what do you mean to do about it?" he demanded, curtly.

"There, now you're talking sense!" cried Morley, warming his fingers over the lantern, which he had placed on the bench. "Now give him the whole story, Yardley, so's he can see where we all stand, and 'ow square we are about it. Tell him 'ow he's queered our little game by killing the loidy."

"To what game do you refer?" cried Keene, angrily addressing the physician. "I'll not remain here to be talked to in enigmas."

"Listen and I'll explain," said Yardley. "Mrs. Russell is very wealthy, worth nearly a million. She has been very anxious to see her daughter wedded to a foreigner with a title. I discovered this in London five months ago, when called upon to attend her professionally."

"Well, what of all that?"

"This of it," continued Yardley. "I cultivated the lady's acquaintance, gained her esteem, and won her greater favor by introducing my friend, Jimmy Morley, as one Lord Moreland. Do you begin to take in the little game?"

"Assuming you both to be scoundrels, it would be very plain," said Keene, dryly.

Yardley laughed with villainous satisfaction.

"By marrying Jimmy to the girl," he continued; "the old lady's money could have been cleverly brought our way."

"Along with the girl!"

"The disposal of her was an after consideration."

"No doubt!"

"I urged the old lady on," continued Yardley; "and met with but one difficulty. The girl absolutely refused to think of marrying the lordship I had brought forward and laid in her lap."

"How were you to get over that?"

"The old lady fixed that for us. She threatened to disinherit her daughter, and

leave her entire estate to charity, unless the girl consented."

"This desire must have been very strong in Mrs. Russell."

"Strong don't express it. It was like a mania. Her one idea was to make her daughter the wife of an English lord."

"Which you doubtless encouraged."

"Well, rather!" bowed Yardley. "I finally advised her to come to Boston, where most of her property is located, and to take the steps necessary to execute the threats she had made. I figured that the girl would submit, when she found that her mother really meant what she said. The fact that Mrs. Russell was in serious ill-health, and might possibly die within a week of executing such a will, made our pull on the girl all the stronger."

"Did you see any signs of her submitting?"

"I am sure our scheme would have worked but for the death of the girl," said Yardley, decisively. "We have been five months playing this little game, and I'm not one who chases a bubble. It has been played at a great expense. The death of the girl has ruined all, and for that you are responsible, Dr. Kendall. Fortunately, I have you in a hole, however, and now I mean to force you to pay the bills."

"Do you think so?"

"I know so!" said Yardley, with a threatening nod. "Exposure would ruin you. One word from me will give Detective Keene the key to the whole mystery, and place you—Where are you going, Jimmy?"

"I heard some one outside!"

Morley had stolen softly to one of the front windows, and his rasping whisper came back through the semi-darkness.

The step of a hurrying man was heard approaching, and Morley peered out to make sure that he passed along.

He saw the man come, go, and vanish up

the street; and only the face of the watching scoundrel would have betrayed the discovery he had made.

The person he had seen come and go was Dr. Roy Kendall, the man he believed to be talking with Cyrus Yardley.

"It's all right, Yardley!" he whispered, hoarsely. "The guy has gone on his way!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESULT OF MORLEY'S DISCOVERY.

During the interval while Yardley stool silently watching the movements of his confederate, Keene had time for a quick review of the case, and some of the features that had mystified him. It was plain there was no collusion between these men and Dr. Kendall. The latter was an entire stranger to them. Up to the very hour of Stella Russell's death, their infamous game evidently had been that of coercing a helpless girl and swindling a shallow-minded old woman, already on the brink of the grave. It was of this game that Keene had heard them talking in the smoking-room.

Now several new questions had risen in his mind.

When and how had Yardley discovered the guilt of the Boston physician?

Why had Kendall so cautiously planned his visit to the hotel, and ended an interview, for which Stella Russell had been anxious, by taking her life?

Was it a case of suicide by a distressed and harassed girl?

If so, why had Dr. Kendall fled like a criminal and a coward?

These were the questions flashing through Keene's mind when he saw Jimmy Morley returning, and again heard Yardley addressing him.

"Now, Dr. Kendall, we have looked you up and find you a man of high standing, and a man of wealth."

"Well, suppose I am, Dr. Yardley. What then?"

"Do you mean to accept our terms? Or will you suffer us to expose you?"

"In a word, sir, you wish me to buy your silence?"

"That hits the nail on the head," said Yardley, decisively. "You have spoiled our game, doctor, but we don't propose to quit losers."

Jimmy Morley moved his toe about among the shavings until it struck against a piece of joist.

"What price do you expect me to pay?" demanded Keene.

"Considering all things, we will let you down easy."

"What do you call easy?"

"Say twenty thousand dollars, paid down in cash."

"I'll not consider it!"

Morley worked his toe under the stick of joist, and raised it till he could grasp the end with his hand.

"You'll do better," Yardley answered, sternly. "You'll do better than consider it. You'll pay it!"

"This is a case of blackmail!" cried Keene, with a feigned mingling of desperation and anger.

"Call it what you like."

"How do I know you possess the evidence of my guilt?" persisted Keene. "Tell me its nature? Tell of what it consists? If you can show me in just what way I am in your power——"

"In this way!" suddenly cried Morley, from behind him.

The ruffian's words were accompanied with an oath, and with a blow that was dealt to kill.

It would have effected the miscreant's object, and have laid the detective out forever, but for one slight circumstance. Yardley,

who was standing directly in front of Keene, saw the heavy weapon descend, and involuntarily recoiled.

Keene's quick eye observed this movement. To him it was like a warning. The detective instantly ducked, throwing up his arm to shield his head; but the blow glanced side-wise from his head and shoulder, and laid him senseless on the floor of the gloomy shop.

Yardley sprang forward with a cry of dismay.

"Good God! What have you done, Jimmy? You've killed the man!"

"I hope so," returned Morley, throwing down the piece of joist.

"What do you mean?"

"Pull off his disguise and you'll see what I mean. The man is not Dr. Kendall."

"What?"

"It's Sheridan Keene!"

Yardley sprang to the side of the prostrate detective and tore away his disguise.

The pale face of the stricken officer stared up at him through the gloom, like the hueless face of a corpse.

"You're right, Jimmy!" Yardley gasped, amazedly.

"I knew I was right. The guy that went by outside was Kendall."

"The devil you say!"

"You see my lamps are worth something, after all."

"This beats me."

"It don't beat me!" cried Jimmy Morley, now kicking the shavings into a pile on the floor.

"But how could he have learned that we were going to meet Kendall?"

"You're a fool," cried Morley; "with all your oily gammon! We have had no talk with Kendall."

"What do you mean?"

"There lies the man who was on the end of your wire."

"Then he must suspect——"

"Kendall, of course!" cried Morley. "He must have been in his office and answered your call."

"It certainly appears so, now."

"He has piped the whole business."

"What are you doing?"

"What do you think I am doing, making up my bed?" demanded Morley, with a vicious display of determination. "This beak is in our way, and must be removed."

Yardley hesitated.

There could be no doubt as to what the movements of his more desperate confederate meant. Already Morley had gathered a great pile of shavings on the floor and under the wooden bench.

"Do you think it's necessary, Jimmy?" ventured Yardley.

The younger ruffian swung round with an oath.

"Haven't you got any brains?" he demanded. "D'ye think the beak has twigg'd Kendall after the talk we have made?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"Then what can we do with Kendall, if this fellow lives?"

"Not a thing."

"But if we do him, the game is in our hands."

"That's true."

"We alone will be wise about Kendall, and can force him to the wall. D'ye think——"

"I think you're right," interrupted Yardley. "Make haste with the job."

"Get the door-key out of his pocket."

"I have it."

"Is he in space?"

"For a long time yet, Jimmy, after the blow you gave him."

"Five minutes will serve us and do him!"

Look lively, now, and open the side windows. The crib will burn like tinder."

Yardley threw open both windows on either side, and a draught of wintry air swept through the gloomy building.

For a moment Morley bent over the motionless figure on the floor, then raised one arm and dropped it.

It fell like an arm of lead.

Then the knave started up, poured the oil from his lantern over the shavings, tossed the wick into the pile and touched a match to it. On the instant the inflammable stuff he had collected was in a blaze.

"The door, Yardley!" cried Morley, hoarsely. "Make sure it's locked!"

This was quickly accomplished after their egress, and a minute later both men had reached the extremity of Akron court, and vanished round the corner.

Already the flames were flooding the street with red light and were stealing up the walls inside.

Sheridan Keene still lay senseless on the floor.

The flight of the two miscreants had been precipitous, and they now were well away—so far, in fact, that they did not hear the cry then sounding on the night air.

"Fire! fire! fire!"

A new figure had appeared on the scene.

It was that of a man climbing in through one of the side windows, where the way was yet clear; and who saw at a glance that the building could not be saved with the means at command.

Yet this man was the owner of the building, one Mr. Carleton. Prompted by curiosity, after having loaned Keene the key, he had ventured approaching the shop in the hope of discovering what was in the wind.

He had seen three men enter the building, and only two emerge, running away at full speed. The occasion was very quickly ap-

parent, and the magnitude of the crime was at once suspected.

While shouting the alarm, Carleton hurriedly climbed through the side window. The figure of Keene was plainly discernible on the floor in the glare of the approaching flames.

Carleton raised him in his arms and bore him to the window, where, for the first time since being struck down, Sheridan Keene showed signs of returning consciousness, and opened his eyes.

"Thank heaven, they have not killed you!" Carleton cried, lifting him bodily out of the window to the ground outside.

The sweep of cold air on Keene's face acted like a stimulant. He steadied himself by the window frame, looking vaguely at the speaker for a moment, and then suddenly grasped the full significance of his words, and of what had occurred.

"Killed me!" he faintly echoed, pulling himself together on hearing his own voice. "Not by a long chalk! I am worth a dozen dead men yet!"

Nevertheless, the newspapers of the following morning contained startling stories of the complete destruction of Carleton's shop by fire the previous night, and of the discovery of a charred body in the ruins. The calamity was attributed to the carelessness of some vagabond, who presumably had entered the place for shelter, and whose pipe had set fire to the shavings of which he had made a bed.

The issue of these reports, however, was but another move on the part of Sheridan Keene.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BOOT ON THE OTHER LEG.

The following morning dawned clear and cold.

Sheridan Keene had figured to a nicety what would follow, when Yardley and his

confederate believed that he was dead, and that they were not suspected of having fired Carleton's shop.

By Yardley's own words, it had been only his fear of the detective that had restrained him from boldly visiting Dr. Kendall at his house; and now, with the belief that Keene was dead, the immediate conduct of the scoundrels could easily be anticipated.

Keene knew, further, that they would feel that Boston was becoming uncomfortably warm for them; and that they would lose no time in attempting to coerce the local physician, and then effect their departure from the country.

In anticipation of this, Keene was alert that morning, and in a new disguise was engaged in shadowing the hotel.

That he had reasoned well, became apparent about nine o'clock, when he saw both Yardley and Jimmy Morley leave the house, and depart in the direction of Dr. Kendall's residence.

They were nicely dressed, and by their faces were well satisfied with the turn affairs had taken.

"I will speedily change that look for them!" was Keene's mental exclamation when he saw them depart. "Now to discover how Kendall will receive them, and what he will say! I must head them off, and get into his house before them."

They were walking leisurely, apparently discussing their design, and he felt absolutely sure of their destination.

Hastening through one of the side streets, which materially reduced the distance, Keene entered the shop of a gas-fitter and borrowed a blouse and cap, displaying his badge and explaining his project.

Two minutes later, with a foot of iron pipe and a wrench in his hand, he hurried into the alley back of Kendall's residence, and applied for admission at the basement door.

"I am the city gas-fitter," he explained to the servant who responded to his knock on the door. "I wish to examine your gas meter."

"It's out front, sir, in the coal cellar," the girl replied, offering no objection.

"I know where it is, thanks."

The servant returned to the kitchen.

The detective slipped through the entry and stole up to the front hall.

Two women were talking in the doctor's reception-room.

"He will not receive them in there," Keene instantly decided.

The reception-room joined the front parlor, with only a portière between, and the detective also excluded the latter room as improbable. Crouching under the front stairs, he observed that a servant was sweeping the dining-room. Only one other room remained on that floor, and the door of it was closed.

Keene took the chance of being observed, and stole across the hall to peer through the keyhole.

"The doctor's operating-room," he muttered. "It appears to be vacant."

He took a second chance, and softly opened the door. It was a large, square room, with a single window. A long operating-table was in the middle of the floor. Fixed upon two of the side walls were cabinets, with shelves containing splints, trusses, and various surgical appliances.

"It's a hundred to one he will bring them out here," Keene decided.

He looked for a closet in which to conceal himself, but could find none.

In one corner of the room, however, stood a tall, closed box, which he hastened to open.

It contained a skeleton, hanging from a hook at the top of the box.

"The very place," muttered Keene, triumphantly. "I'll have to ask you to vacate these

lodgings, my emaciated friend! The place for you is a dime museum."

Hastily opening one of the several large drawers under the cabinet shelves, he unhooked the skeleton, and with more reverence than ceremony, he dumped the rattling bones into the drawer and closed it.

Then he stepped within the tall box, which easily admitted his figure, and held the door ajar.

"As snug as a bug in a rug!" he said to himself, with much satisfaction. "I couldn't have invented a better concealment had I laid awake nights to plan it. Now, if the doctor will only bring the two knaves out here for their little interview, I think——"

But he there stopped thinking in that line, for he heard the sound of the door-bell and the tread of the physician himself on the floor above.

He waited patiently.

At the end of three minutes his genius was rewarded.

Dr. Kendall opened the door of the operating-room, and entered.

Behind him came Dr. Yardley and Jimmy Morley, well primed for their intimidating design.

Keene held the door of the box so that he could peer out through a mere crack, while every word that was spoken easily reached his ears.

"Excuse my bringing you out here, gentlemen," said Kendall. "My wife has early callers, and has occupied my office."

"That's all right, doctor," said Yardley, rather grimly. "It's all the better if we are where we will not be overheard."

Dr. Kendall was quite pale, but he gravely waved the two men to chairs.

"What am I to infer from that observation?" he asked, curtly. "I recognize you as a man I saw upon the scene of that unfortu-

nate tragedy night before last, but I have yet to learn your business with me."

"By gracious!" thought Keene; "this man don't act much like a criminal, nor one to be easily intimidated. If he is really guilty of this crime, his nerve is unparalleled."

"Oh, I will explain our business quickly enough!" exclaimed Yardley, with scurrilous significance.

"Do so at once, then," said Dr. Kendall, standing motionless in the floor. "It's time I started out on my round of visits."

"You are a cool one, to say the least," grinned Yardley.

"I realize no occasion for excitement," was the haughty reply. "State your business at once, or I must leave you."

"Well, Dr. Kendall," and Yardley began to show temper; "we happen to know all about that little affair on Thursday night, in which you was involved."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, it's so!"

"Well, what of it?"

"Look here, Dr. Kendall, you had better come off your high horse with me," Yardley sternly cried. "We're not here for amusement, or to be given a bluff."

"You rather have come to give one, I should say," retorted Kendall, curtly. "But, sir, allow me to add, that you have not selected a very easy mark."

"We'll see about that," returned Yardley, with a threatening nod. "We know, and can prove, that you were the party who dined with Stella Russell on Thursday night, and who is responsible for her death. Are you aware, Dr. Kendall, that the detectives of Boston are now searching for her murderer?"

"Oh, yes, I am well aware of it."

"And that a word from me will utterly expose you, sir?"

"I hear you say so."

"Isn't it a fact?"

"I am willing to take your word for it," said Dr. Kendall, drawing up his fine figure and giving his hand a deprecatory wave.

"And in the face of this, and what has occurred, do you mean that you defy me?" angrily demanded Yardley, quite nonplused by the physician's haughty indifference.

"No, I do not defy you," was the answer. "I merely care nothing about you."

"Don't you know that exposure will ruin you, convict you of the crime and send you to prison, if not to the scaffold?" demanded Yardley, with vicious impatience.

"I hear what you say, and now know at what you are driving," said Dr. Kendall, sternly. "You have come here to intimidate me, if possible, and to extort money from me. Am I right?"

"That is the situation, precisely!"

"Then here is my answer," said the physician, with a magnificent display of mingled dignity and contempt. "There is the door. Go at once to the police headquarters and make your disclosure. I will not stand in your way. After you have told your story, I will tell mine, and face the music."

"Your story!" sneered Yardley.

"Yes, my story!" cried the physician. "Not that Stella Russell was murdered, a fact which, I think, you know as well as I; but that her death was the result of a most lamentable accident."

Yardley sprang angrily to his feet.

"Suppose it was! Admit that it was!" he cried, viciously. "You can't prove that it was! Your every act has been that of a man who killed her. I happen to have the evidence by which you possibly might sustain a claim that her death was accidental; but you can secure that evidence, Dr. Kendall, only by paying me my price. I'll gamble you'll come to my terms before I am through with you!"

Kendall still stood motionless in the floor,

his dark eyes frowning on the disappointed face of the angry scoundrel.

"You, then, are the person who examined Miss Russell's body before I arrived there," he said, curtly. "It must have been at that time that you discovered and secured the evidence of which you speak."

"That's it, precisely!" cried Yardley. "And the moment you laid your hands upon her, I knew you were the party that she had dined with. You at once felt of her throat in search for—"

"One moment, sir," interrupted Kendall. "I now realize that I cannot easily prove just how Stella Russell met her death, since you have been knave enough to remove the one bit of evidence by which I might have done so. You now ask me to buy this evidence at your price. Do you happen to have it with you this morning?"

"Yes, sir, I have," Yardley impulsively answered, thinking the doctor about to yield. "I brought it—"

"That's enough!" Kendall forcibly interrupted, striding to the door and placing his back against it.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you'll give it to me before you leave this room!" cried the physician, with terrible sternness. "I mean that both of you are scoundrels and blacklegs, with whom I will have no dealings! You shall be arrested for blackmail within the hour! Now that I am threatened thus, I will tell the truth like a man. You shall produce this evidence in the presence of officers—"

"Oh, no I'll not!" Yardley viciously interrupted. "I'll do nothing of the kind. I'll keep my hold on you, for all the bluff that you are making. The evidence—"

"Produce that evidence, Yardley, and let me see what it's like!"

The last came in a ringing voice from Sheridan Keene. He came out of his con-

cealment with his revolver in his hand, and striding straight to the knavish English physician, thundered sternly:

"Produce it, I say! And consider yourself under arrest!"

"Good God!" gasped Yardley, white as death itself. "You—alive?"

"Yes, alive, no thanks to you or yonder ruffian!" cried Keene. "Sit down, Morley, or I'll drop you in a surer way than you dropped me. I want both of you scoundrels for arson."

Morley, who was attempting to sneak out by the door, grimly returned and dropped into the chair indicated.

"I reckon the game's up now, Yardley," he said, with a sullen leer. "The infernal beak dies as hard as a cat."

"I am given life to look after such as you," sternly rejoined Keene. "Now, Yardley, what is the evidence you and Dr. Kendall were discussing?"

Yardley, pale and utterly disconcerted, hesitated for a moment.

"Produce it!" cried Keene, sternly.

The physician felt in his vest pocket, drew forth a small object, and tossed it upon the operating-table. It was a three-cornered portion of fish-bone, nearly half an inch across.

Now Dr. Kendall impulsively came forward.

"Good heavens, Inspector Keene!" he exclaimed, in tremulous tones; "what does your presence here mean?"

"It means," said Keene, turning to face him; "that these two men are under arrest, and that I will hear your story a little later. Go to your telephone, sir, and summon the police patrol."

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE KNIFE.

Half an hour later, Chief Inspector Watts and Sheridan Keene were seated with Dr.

Kendall in the physician's private office, with the door securely closed.

Yardley and Jimmy Morley had been lodged in the Tombs, and the end of their rope was plainly to be a prison cell.

"Now, Dr. Kendall," said the chief, to whom Keene had reported all the evidence; "I understand from my officer that your attitude this morning, when you certainly could not have been aware of his presence, indicates that you may be innocent of any willful misdemeanor. I will frankly admit that we have suspected you of Stella Russell's murder. If we are wrong, we now wish to know it."

"You most assuredly are wrong, Chief Watts, though I admit that circumstances have appeared very strong against me," replied Dr. Kendall, with grave feeling.

"You were the man with whom she dined, were you not?"

"Oh, yes; though not exactly dined," said the physician; "for our interview was for a different purpose."

"Tell me the whole story, please."

"I will gladly do so, sir, now that a distortion of it is so apparent."

"Let me hear it."

Dr. Kendall bowed and drew himself up in his chair.

"The Russells, mother and daughter, were friends of mine years ago," he said, gravely.

"In fact I at one time thought of marrying Stella Russell, though it never came to pass. We retained our tender friendship, however, up to the time she and her mother went to Europe several years ago."

"Go on, sir."

"I heard nothing more of Stella Russell," continued the doctor, "until last Thursday afternoon, the day of her unfortunate death. I knew that they had arrived in Boston, but I had not seen them. About six o'clock on

• Thursday, I was called to my telephone by Miss Russell."

"Where was she?"

"At the hotel."

"What did she want?"

"She stated to me that she was in very great trouble, and implored me to come to her assistance. I told her that I would call on her at once in her rooms, but she immediately begged me not to do that. She stated that she was being watched by certain parties, who were constantly near her, and that our meeting must be a secret one."

"Did she plan it?"

"She had it planned already, sir. She said she had secured a private dining-room, and told me where it was located. She said she would join me in the room at precisely eleven o'clock, after her return from the opera. She further stated that she knew how exceedingly jealous my wife always had been of her, and she suggested that I had better wear a disguise, lest any person should see me at the hotel in which she was located, and subsequently disclose the fact to my wife."

"Is this jealousy of your wife a fact?" asked the chief.

"A very lamentable one!" bowed Dr. Kendall, gravely. "I am rather unhappily married in that respect, sir; and hence I thought well enough of Miss Russell's advice to follow it. I also went so far as to give my wife a light drug at dinner, that she might drop asleep in the evening while I was with her, and not awake until after my return from the hotel. I did not imagine I should be detained there longer than an hour. I took all of these steps, sir, with the sole object of harmlessly deceiving my wife; though I now imagine, from what you have told me, that it has operated to augment your suspicions."

"Up to that time, then, you did not know what Miss Russell wanted of you?" said Chief Watts, inquiringly.

"No, I did not."

"But you went to the hotel and met her as planned?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did she want of you?"

"She wanted my help chiefly to foil the two scoundrels you have arrested here to-day, and who must have outrageously been imposing upon the girl's mother. It appeared that Mrs. Russell intended making a will disinheriting her daughter, unless Stella would marry—"

"We know all about that part of it, doctor," interposed Chief Watts. "What we now wish to learn is, what was Miss Russell's object in sending for you?"

"I can state that very briefly," bowed the physician. "Mrs. Russell, being about to make a will, and having been long away from Boston, had remarked to Stella, that she thought of appealing to me to recommend my attorney. Stella seized upon this as an opportunity to deceive her mother, in which I think she was quite justified, and to circumvent Yardley."

"In what way?"

"By getting me to recommend a lawyer, and to arrange with him in advance, to make a will that should be void on some obscure technicality after the death of Mrs. Russell. It was her intentions to will her property to charity. If Stella's plan could have been operated, and such a will executed, the property could easily be claimed and secured by the girl."

"Do you know how such a will can be made, doctor?"

"There are many ways, sir. Stella's suggestion was that the lawyer draft a will bequeathing the property to the various churches and institutions Mrs. Russell had in mind, instead of to the boards of trustees of those organizations. That would have made the will void, sir, in the sight of the law; and

the technicality is one which Mrs. Russell would not have been likely to detect."

"I see, I see!" nodded Chief Watts. "Was Mrs. Russell in poor health?"

"She has been a sufferer from Bright's disease, and her death has long been imminent."

"All this is now sufficiently plain," said Chief Watts, gravely. "But what led to Stella Russell's death?"

As if from some painful recollection called up by the inquiry, a little of the color faded from Dr. Kendall's cheeks.

"I will tell you," said he. "While sitting at the table, explaining her situation to me in some little excitement, she was tasting, now and then, of a plate of fish near by her. Suddenly I observed that she was choking, and was almost in convulsions. A bone from the fish had lodged in her throat. I tried at once to remove it for her, and wanted to give an alarm. With looks and gestures, however, she implored me not to do so; and I saw that she feared lest I should be recognized in her company, and the plan ruined on which she was basing her hopes.

"Her condition quickly became so critical, that I resolved to perform an operation by which her life, at least, could be saved."

"What operation?"

"That of opening the trachea until the obstruction could be removed. The girl was then nearly unconscious and in convulsions.

"I had a small surgical case in my pocket. Taking out of it a scalpel, I bent above her to make the incision in the trachea, when she suddenly threw up one of her arms. It struck my hand a violent blow, that in which I held the knife, and it drove the sharp blade entirely through the jugular vein."

"Ah!" exclaimed Chief Watts; "it was an accident, then!"

"Precisely, sir, and a most dreadful one!" said Dr. Kendall. "But there then was no help for the girl, sir. I saw her die on the floor."

"And then?"

"Then, sir, I realized my own situation, the circumstances under which I had come there, my disguise and the secrecy with which I had kept this appointment. I realized that I might be ruined by exposure, and my reputa-

tion as a man and a physician unworthily demeaned.

"While thus dismayed, I saw Yardley at the window, and I acted upon my first impulse and resorted to flight. It seemed to me the only way by which I could save myself from ruin and exposure. That is all I have to say, sir; and it is the whole truth."

"Have you known that you were suspected, Dr. Kendall?" asked the chief.

"No, sir; not until this morning. I had made up my mind, if charges were ever made against me, to confess the truth at once. Hence, I cared nothing about Yardley's threat. As for that miscreant, when he examined Stella Russell's body, he discovered the bone lodged in her throat, and removed it. I do not know what his design then was, though it soon developed when he saw me search for the same in examining the remains of the girl, and betray myself when I failed to find it."

"What about your silence on the subject up to the present time?"

"I have been actuated solely by my desire to save my reputation as a man and a physician, sir. That alone has been my object."

"Well, well," said Chief Watts, gravely; "we will see if it cannot be saved after all!"

A look of relief swept to Dr. Kendall's fine countenance, and he impulsively held out his hand.

Chief Watts was as good as his remark had implied. Though the actual circumstances were made public in a general way, and the mystery satisfactorily cleared, the name of the physician involved was withheld.

Stella Russell was buried on the following Saturday, and nine days later her mother died, without having left her bed.

A true bill was found against both Yardley and Jimmy Morley by the Grand Jury, and they were tried for arson and easily convicted, each receiving a sentence of five years in the State's prison.

THE END.

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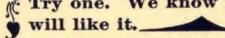
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